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Letter dated 8 February 2017 from the Permanent Representative of Burundi to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to submit herewith the address to the nation, delivered on 5 February 2017 by the President of the Republic of Burundi, H. E. Pierre Nkurunziza, on the occasion of the twenty-sixth anniversary of the Charter of National Unity (see annex).

I should be grateful if the present letter and its annex were circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Albert **Shingiro**
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Permanent Representative of Burundi to United Nations

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Annex to the letter dated 8 February 2017 from the Permanent Representative of Burundi to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Address to the nation by the President of the Republic of Burundi, H. E. Pierre Nkurunziza, on the occasion of the twenty-sixth anniversary of the Charter of National Unity

5 February 2017

Dear compatriots, friends of Burundi,

I give thanks to God who always watches over us up to this day of joy when we commemorate the twenty-sixth anniversary of the adoption of the Charter of National Unity.

Twenty-six years have gone by since the people of Burundi pledged to revive unity. They hence decided to give a wide berth to anything that could set them against one another, and they committed themselves to fighting against anyone who could involve them in divisions based on ethnicity, region, religion and other evils.

I wish all Burundians, those who are inside the country as well as those who are outside the country, a joyful celebration of national unity, the very unity that is the cornerstone of sustainable peace and development.

The theme chosen for the twenty-sixth anniversary of the Charter of National Unity is "Let us consolidate national unity, a shield for sustainable peace and development". This is an opportunity for every Burundian to self-assess and commit himself or herself to consolidating the unity both in words and actions.

Thanks to the noble initiative taken by the people of Burundi to embark on the path of unity, this memorable day in the life of our country comes at a time when Burundians live in harmony and peace.

The main objective of this festive day is a soul-searching exercise, to revisit our past and remind one another of all the obstacles that undermined our unity, especially from the time when Burundi was placed under the colonial subjugation that prompted a political-based rule.

Our ancestors did not rely on written legal provisions to organize political and social life. The promotion of human rights, truth, justice and equity, respect for law and authority, mutual understanding and respect, the spirit of mutual aid and solidarity, good behaviour and other values, were part and parcel of the cultural heritage and customs of Burundi and were perpetuated through a legendary traditional education. Consequently, Burundians of yesteryear knew very well to distinguish between what is allowed and what is forbidden. They lived together in peace and harmony and were able to settle their sporadic disputes peacefully.

Prior to the colonization of Burundi, ethnicity and regions, which ill-intentioned people have used to divide Burundian citizens, were not meaningful. Indeed, the most important thing every Burundian highlighted in the socioeconomic organization was the big clan to which they belonged, the descendants of the same ancestor considered themselves as blood relatives. That was the starting point of

unity which could spread thanks to the gifts of cows and lands that they used to give one another and through intermarriage. In addition, we should bear in mind that even God always used a person or a family to bless a country.

Apart from that, every clan used to have a responsibility in the socioeconomic organization, a special gift from God that the clan offered to the pre-colonial Burundian society. Therefore, clans and families were viewed as complementary and interdependent. A breeder needed a labourer, a hunter needed a blacksmith, a clothes-maker needed a potter, the king and his officials needed cooks and cow-keepers.

There were people who helped the king govern the country in provinces, the royal defence and security forces, secretaries and ministers, blacksmiths, hunters, servants, prophets interpreting the signs of the times, milking servants, etc. Many of these people came from the clans of Baganwa, Bahanza, Bajiji, Banyange, Banyakarama, Babanda and Benengwe, and many other clans.

The clan was at the same time a reference and a mirror reflecting the personality of its members. A brave person from the family was the pride of his clan, while a villain in a family shamed his whole clan. It is in this sociological context that certain commonly used adages in Burundi are rooted, such as "He who eats a dog shames his whole clan or family" or "The king shall ask you your clan, not what you have eaten".

Most often, members of the same clan had a common ancestor, others shared geographical origins. You should know that clans such as Abajiji, Abacuri, Abanyakarama, Abaha, Abenengwe, Abungura, Abakiga, and others were shared by Bahutu, Batutsi and Batwa ethnic groups. It is obvious that the true unity used to be based on Burundian clans and families, and it is exactly this socioeconomic foundation that the colonizers undermined to destroy our national unity.

Considering the importance of the role played by the clans in the consolidation of national unity and in the light of the negative impact that their dislocation has had on Burundian society, where some people cannot recognize members of their clans and have therefore lost the sense of mutual help and solidarity, it is more than desirable to restore this legacy from our illustrious ancestors and to shrug off some beliefs and lies.

It is painful to see that some people kill each other on the basis of ethnicity, whereas in the beginning they were from the same clan, just as Cain killed his brother Abel which resulted in being cursed forever.

As our forefathers passed on us the ideals of love and unity, nothing can prevent us from following suit in their footsteps. This should even be our lifelong habit. Let us stop being stagnant, let us rather make progress from the level they have reached and, one day, when future generations analyse what we have gone through, they will say that if brave people had not intervened at the right moment, Burundi would have disappeared.

According to ethnographic studies undertaken by those who came to confuse us and to divide us on the basis of simple morphological details, people who do not belong to the same ethnic group cannot speak the same language and do not share the same culture and customs. Since the people of Burundi speak the same language

and share a culture and customs, on what grounds did Belgians divide Burundians into three ethnic groups?

No one can say that the terms Umuhutu, Umututsi and Umutwa are colonial inventions. The harm that the Belgians did was to manipulate and divert them with an objective and meaning that are completely different from the core meaning that Burundians used to give them. This became clear through the Royal Decree of 21 August 1925 of King Albert I of Belgium, reorganizing the administration of the Congo and Ruanda-Urundi colonies. That law lies at the origin of all the bad things and events that have cast shadows on Burundi so far, and even today that law has not been abrogated.

What caused the most sadness is that, even after Burundi regained independence, the foundation of national unity built by Prince Rwagasore and his valiant comrades in struggle was destroyed immediately and, as a result, Burundi was led by institutions that were favourable to the ideology and the plans of colonizers. Some Burundian citizens were persecuted because of an ethnic label that they were forced to bear while others were persecuted because of their region of origin. Some were killed, others were forced into exile, while Burundi was burdened by sorrow and tears, despair and trauma for many years.

Yes, it is true, 26 years have passed since we regained the national unity inherited from our forefathers. But today, no one would dare say that the Burundian unity is a finished project or a beaten path. So you would ask me: "What can we do to ensure that Burundi is marked by this unity, which is not deceiving, a true unity, a unity that one can recognize through words and deeds?"

- Considering that unity, concord and mutual aid are among the human values that have characterized the Burundian people, these must be taught to all generations, and they must be the object of exchange everywhere.
- Every Burundian is called upon to banish all language and behaviour that are likely to divide people and to ensure that national unity becomes the stanza and the refrain in everyday life.
- To recall and repeat unceasingly that, in our differences, we have the same mother: our homeland, Burundi.
- To love and make the motherland loved, and to keep the conviction that this is a common good. We must all feel proud to be called Burundians and demonstrate this dignity.
- Bear in mind that unity is strength and make sure that development projects and activities are organized to bring Burundians together.
- Ensure the visibility for all Burundians who live according to the ideal of unity, so that they serve as an example to those who are still behind.
- Remind us constantly that unity is the shield and the foundation for sustainable development.
- To ban all speech and attitudes that are likely to bring about divisions and any other behaviour likely to separate people and tear the Burundian social fabric.

- To bear witness to the truth, so that justice and equity may be restored to our country, Burundi, as they were before the arrival of the colonizers.
- To point fingers, denounce betrayals and disapprove massively of any attitude or behaviour that might plunge us back into the chaos of the past or make us lose our achievements.
- The patriotic education and training programme will include chapters that help people to understand and internalize the validity of national unity and the disastrous consequences of division.
- Let us know that what unites us is more significant than what divides us, and that our differences are riches, because they allow us to recognize ourselves as complementary to one another.
- To safeguard the values and traditions that always characterized our ancestors.
- I ask the media to reserve a sufficient time-slot to broadcast cultural and social programmes that strengthen the national unity.

This year, I launched a moralization campaign, to educate the population to demonstrate an attitude and behave in accordance with the highest human value: ubuntu. All citizens must draw their inspiration from the tradition of our forefathers. National unity will play a central role in the exchange workshops that will be organized.

We are doubly satisfied because there are clear signs that many Burundians have already understood the importance of advocating unity and strengthening it. The fairly recent events in which some selfish traitors, with the complicity of some foreigners who are used to dividing societies, have done their best to divide the Burundian people, without success.

The unity that we are celebrating today is therefore not a lesson learned, it is a good legacy left by our ancestors. You remember that even in the last stanza of our national anthem we sing this: "May unity, bravery and tranquillity prevail forever in Burundi". You will also remember that the national motto of Burundi begins with "unity".

Let me say that unity is a treasure that all peoples of the world rely on to achieve peace and sustainable development. We should therefore always avoid taking it lightly or neglecting it!

These days, we note that those who have invested in divisions and programmes to sow hatred among the Burundian population resemble an orchestra without a spectator, because there are not many who still trust or support them. Let us therefore remain in solidarity by reminding ourselves that national unity has always been the shield that has protected our country during the different crises it has gone through, and then let us always turn a deaf ear to those who nourish the dream of maintaining divisions within our population.

I invite all Burundians to complement each other, to feel at home in their country as sons and daughters of the nation, to combine their efforts despite their differences, to support any initiative aimed at improving the well-being of the population and, finally to achieve progress and development of our beloved homeland.

I take this opportunity to appeal to all Burundian refugees to return to their homeland so that they may contribute to building their country with their brothers and sisters, inasmuch as peace is a reality throughout the country. I ask all Burundians to show their legendary love and hospitality in welcoming their brothers and sisters who are returning to the country, to help them, to support them, to share with them what they have and to help them feel at home.

I would like to reiterate my exhortation to support the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, today at work. In order to strengthen unity, all that has disrupted it in the past, such as lies, hatred, rumours, fabricated stories, hiding the truth, etc., must be brought to light. We will thus be able to make the decision of a fresh start of peace that God gave us without consulting anybody.

I wish for all Burundian citizens, without exception, to celebrate joyfully this anniversary of the Charter of National Unity. Let us consolidate national unity, a shield for sustainable peace and development.

May God bless Burundi and the people of Burundi.

May God bind us together in unwavering unity.